

또래 괴롭힘 공격적 피해, 수동적 피해 및 가해 유아의 사회적 행동, 심리사회적 적응과 언어능력

Social Behaviors, Psychosocial Adjustments, and Language Ability of Aggressive Victims, Passive Victims, and Bullies in Preschool Children

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<Abstract>

This study investigated prevalence rates and differences in social behaviors, psychosocial adjustments, and language ability of preschool children who engaged in bully/victim subgroups: aggressive victims, passive victims, bullies, and non-involved. The participants were 297 preschool children and their teachers in Jeju City. The teachers measured children's peer victimization, social behaviors, and teacher-child relationships. Children's language ability and self-concept were also assessed by individual interview. There were significant differences in social behaviors, psychosocial adjustments, and language ability among the bully/victim subgroups. Aggressive victims included in a high risk group characterized by a high level of aggression, ADHD, peer rejection as well as conflicted relationships with teachers. Moreover, they had limited language ability. The findings highlight behavioral heterogeneity among the bully/victim subgroups in early childhood.

본 연구는 유아를 대상으로 또래 괴롭힘에 관련된 네 집단을 공격적 피해, 수동적 피해 및 가해 유아로 구분하여 각 집단의 분포와 심리사회적 특성 및 언어능력을 살펴보았다. 연구대상은 4, 5세 남녀 유아 297명이다. 교사를 통해서 또래 괴롭힘과 사회적 행동 특성 및 교사-유아관계를 측정하였으며, 유아 면접법을 사용하여 언어능력과 자아 개념을 측정하였다. 연구결과를 보면 하위 집단 별로 선행연구와 유사한 심리사회적 특성을 보였으며 이는 유아기 또래 괴롭힘에 개입된 하위 집단의 이질적인 특성을 보여준다.

주제어(Key Words): 또래 괴롭힘(peer victimization), 공격성(aggression), 위축성(withdrawal), 또래거부(peer rejection)

I. Introduction

Peer victimization has serious consequences for children's psychosocial adjustment and has been linked with problems such as loneliness, social anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem(Hawker & Boulton, 2000). Several studies have classified children into subgroups based on whether children are aggressive, victimized, both aggressive and victimized, or neither. Passive victims are victimized without being aggressive, and aggressive victims are victimized and bully others. Bullies are aggressive and are not victimized(Schwartz, 2000; Yiyuan, Farver, Schwartz, & Chang, 2003). Based on previous literature, the prevalence estimates for elementary school children and adolescents were about 6% for aggressive victims(range 5% to 29%), about 15% for passive victims (range 5% to 40%), and about 9% for bullies(range 1% to 24%)(Schwartz, Proctor, & Chien, 2001).

Only a few studies have examined bully/victim subgroups in preschool children. Alsaker and Valkanover(2001) studied kindergarten children aged between five years and seven years in Switzerland. The authors reported that 6.1% of children were classified as passive victims, 10.2% as aggressive victims and 10.8% as bullies. Monks, Ruiz, and Val(2002) investigated aggression in Spanish preschool children aged four to six years. The teachers nominated 35.9% of children as aggressors, 29.3% as victims, 78.3% as defenders, and 17% as supporters.

A number of social behaviors and psychosocial adjustments have been shown to distinguish bully/victim subgroups from non-involved children. Previous research found that aggressive victims are particularly high risks for behavioral and social maladjustment(e.g., Schwartz, 2000; Yiyuan et al., 2003). They were found to be hyperactive, emotionally dysregulated, and least liked by their peers(Schwartz, 2000; Yiyuan et al., 2003). Aggressive victims display high levels of both aggression and depression and obtain low scores on a measure of prosocial behavior(Schwartz, 2000). They also manifest difficulties with impulsive behavior, emotional reactivity, and hyperactivity (Schwartz, 2000). Perry, Kusel, and Perry(1988) suggested that aggressive victims were emotionally

dysregulated and had difficulty modulating their affect during interpersonal conflicts. They may tend to reward the aggressor with a highly emotional response and an exaggerated angry retaliation (Perry et al., 1990). Past researchers have found an association between peer victimization and peer rejection. Aggressive victims receive higher peer rejection scores than other children and are more likely to be rejected than either bullies or passive victims(Schwartz, 2000; Yiyuan et al., 2003).

Passive victims have been found to be withdrawn, worried, and fearful of new situations and to score high on internalizing behavior(Byrne, 1994). Passive victims have been characterized as submissive, nonassertive, and having problems defending themselves(Schwartz, 2000; Yiyuan et al., 2003). Previous studies indicated that frequent victimization was negatively correlated with low self-esteem and self-worth(Hodge & Perry, 1999). Austin and Joseph(1996) found that aggressive and passive victims were more depressed and had lower self-esteem than normative comparison children. Similarly, Egan and Perry(1998) suggested that passive and aggressive victims had low global self-worth as well as low self-perceived peer social competence.

Bullies are characterized by aggression, impulsivity and a strong need to dominate others(Olweus, 1999). They appear to use proactive aggression to establish dominance and leadership in their peer group(Pellegrini, Bartini, & Brooks, 1999). When aggression is used instrumentally in the service of achieving some end, this may indicate to other aggressive children a level of competence and leadership(Pellegrini et al., 1999). Bullies were unlikely to display depression or social anxiety(Juvonen, Graham, & Schuster, 2003). Lagerspetz, Bjorkqvist, Berts, and King(1982) suggested that bullies were less popular than normative comparison children and only slightly more popular than victims. Bullies are not always rejected, but are surrounded by a small group of peers who support and like them(Cairns, Cairns, Necker, Gest, & Griepy, 1988).

Previous research into the distinguishing characteristics of bully-victim subgroups has been conducted mainly with primary and secondary school children and has remained relatively under-studied in early childhood. Peer victimization is a problem which not only appears

during middle childhood and adolescents, but it also emerges in early childhood and is predictive of both transient and enduring social maladjustment(Ladd & Ladd, 1998). Preschool age is a time when children are confronted with the developmental tasks of entering school for the first time and meeting same-age playmates(Pellegrini & Blatchford, 2000). Peer aggression is common experience and is a serious problem even in preschool. Olweus(1991) found that age was a significant determinant of the extent of victimization children experienced; victimized were highest among young children, declined steadily through the primary grades and leveled off during the high school years.

There are several ways in which bully/victim subgroups can be identified, including the use of teacher reports, self-reports, and peer nominations. Self-reports and peer nominations are widely used to obtain data on peer victimization for primary and secondary school students. However, there is a difficulty in the use of these methods to generate reliable data from young children(Rigby, 2004). In the current study, therefore, teacher reports were used to classify bully/victim subgroups. Teacher-reports are useful to obtain information about young children who are under relatively close supervision from teachers, and have been used to identify behavioral problems in preschool children(Ladd & Profilet, 1996). Because teacher-child ratios are higher in preschools than grade schools and the emphasis is on socialization rather than teaching, preschool teachers can be expected to have greater insight into what happens among the children under their supervision(Alsaker & Valkanover, 2001).

On the basis of the findings of previous studies, the present research was guided by the following research issues. The first issue concerned the prevalence of bullies, passive victims, aggressive victims, and non-involved in the study participants and the gender distribution across the bully/victim subgroups. Previous research reported significant gender differences in prevalence rates for the bully/victim subgroups. Girls are more likely to be passive victims and uninvolved children whereas boys are more likely to be bullies and aggressive victims.

Past research has rarely included relational or indirect aggression in which attacks are conducted in a more

secretive manner by means of spreading rumors, excluding children from group or persuading someone to harm peers (Crick & Nelson, 2002). Studies conducted with preschool children have indicated that boys tend to experience overt forms of victimization and bullying, whereas girls tend to experience more indirect and relational forms of victimization(Crick & Grotpeter, 1996). The present study included both overt and relational forms of aggression and victimization in the identification of male and female bullies and victims.

The second research issue focused on differences in social behaviors, psychosocial adjustments, and language ability. The current study examined various psychosocial behaviors exhibited by the bully/victim subgroups, including aggression, withdrawal, and prosocial behavior. It was also of interest to compare the psychosocial adjustment variables including ADHD, peer status, and self-concept which were found to be associated with peer bullying and victimization in previous studies.

The current study extended previous research by adding the component of teacher-child relationships. No previous empirical research to date has directly explored differences in teacher-child relationships among the bully/victim subgroups. The ability to form close relationships with teachers may reflect children's underlying social competence, which is associated with psychosocial adjustment(Capara, Barbarnelli, Pastorelli, Bandura, & Zimbardo, 2000). It is therefore reasonable to assume that the behavioral characteristics of the bully/victim subgroups may affect the relationships which they form with teachers.

Moreover, the present study investigated differences in language ability among the bully/victim subgroups. Although to date no empirical research has investigated this issue, the research question was prompted by previous studies examining the link between aggression and language skills. Low language skills of typically developing young children are a consistent and reliable predictor of physical aggression(Adams, Snowling, Hennessy, & Kind, 1999). Language delay and disruptive behavior problems are consistently associated toward the end of the preschool years(Stevenson, 1996). Stattin and Klakenberg-Larsson(1993) suggested that language

performance could play an important role in the development of aggression trajectories.

The following two research questions were addressed.

- 1) What are the prevalence rates of bully/victim subgroups including aggressive victims, passive victims, bullies, and non-involved?
- 2) Are there differences in social behaviors, psychosocial adjustments, and language ability among bully/victim subgroups?

II. Method

1. Participants

Participants included 297 children(166 boys, 55.9%; 131 girls, 44.1%), of whom 81(27.3%) were four year olds and 216(72.7%) were five year olds. The children were recruited from five daycare centers in Jeju City. Parents provided written consent for their children's participation in the project. Mother's education was distributed as follows: high school graduate, 23.2%; college graduate, 69.4%, graduate work, 4%. Father's education was distributed as follows: no high school 0.3%; high school graduate, 14.1%; college graduate, 77.1%, graduate work, 8.4%.

2. Instruments

1) Peer Victimization

Peer victimization was measured using teacher reports to assess teachers' perception of children's relational and overt victimization experiences. Teachers completed teacher reports related to peer victimization which were used in previous studies(e.g., Crick, Casas, & Ku, 1999; Kochenderfer & Ladd, 1996). The teacher report consisted of 11 items covering both relational and overt victimization(e.g., 'Other children try to hurt this child's feelings by excluding him/her.' 'Other children hit or push this child.'). Teachers responded to these items on a 4-point rating scale. Higher scores indicate higher tendency of peer victimization. Cronbach's alpha was .82.

2) Social Behaviors

Children's social behaviors were evaluated using the Social Competence and Behavior Evaluation scale(SCBE;

LaFreniere & Dumas, 1996). The SCBE consists of 30 items, covering aggression(e.g., 'This child hits, kicks, or bites other children. '), withdrawal(e.g., 'This child is isolated from group. '), and prosocial behavior(e.g. 'This child is cooperative. '). Teachers responded to 20 items using a 4-point rating scale. Higher scores indicate higher tendency of aggression, withdrawal, and prosocial behaviors. Cronbach's alpha was .83 for aggression, .86 for withdrawal, and .80 for prosocial behavior.

3) Teacher-Child Relationships

Teachers completed the quality of their relationship with children in classrooms using the Student-Teacher Relationship Scale(STRS: Pianta & Steinberg, 1992). The STRS included 12 closeness items(e.g., 'I share an affectionate and warm relationship with this child. ') and 12 conflict items(e.g., 'This child and I always seem to be struggling with each other. '). Each item was rated on a 4-point scale. Higher scores indicate higher tendency of close and conflicted relationships with teachers. Cronbach's alpha was .87 for closeness and .87 for conflict.

4) Self-concept

Children's self-concept was measured using the Pictorial Scale of Perceived Competence and Social Acceptance for Young Children(PSPCSA: Harter & Pike, 1984). This measure consisted of 24 items containing subscales to assess young children's perceptions of cognitive competence, physical competence, peer acceptance, and maternal acceptance. Each item was rated on a 4-point scale. A single mean score of self-concept was calculated by averaging the scores over all the items. Higher scores reflect more positive perceptions of self. Cronbach's alpha was .84.

5) ADHD

Teachers completed the Attentive Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder Rating Scale(ADHD-RS: DuPaul, 1991). ADHD-RS includes 18-items which describe difficulties in attention regulation(e.g., "is easily distracted,") and hyperactive off-task behaviors(e.g., "often fidgets or squirms"). Each item is scored on a 0 to 3 rating scale. Cronbach's alpha was .94. Higher scores

indicate higher tendency of ADHD.

6) *Language ability*

Children’s language ability was assessed by Preschool Receptive-Expressive Language Scale(PRES: Kim, Sung, & Lee, 2003). The PRES measures Korean expressive and receptive vocabulary skills for children aged from 2 to 6. The PRES has been standardized on Korean preschool children, has good normative data, and displays satisfactory reliability and validity. Higher scores reflect higher language ability.

7) *Peer acceptance and Peer rejection*

Based on previous literature(Yiyuan et al., 2003), children were provided with a classroom roster and asked to nominated three peers whom they liked most and whom they liked least in their class. The average total number of positive and negative nominations received by each child was then calculated and standardized within each class.

3. Procedure and Data Analysis

Teachers completed the questionnaires to assess peer victimization, social behaviors, teacher-child relationships, and ADHD. Children were individually interviewed to measure Preschool Receptive-Expressive Language Scale, self-concept, and peer nomination. The collected data were analyzed using Pearson correlations, χ^2 and a MANOVA.

III. Results

1. Correlations among All Variables

Correlations between the variables are presented in Table 1. Peer victimization was positively correlated with withdrawal, aggression, and ADHD and negatively correlated with prosocial behavior and language ability. Peer victimization was also positively correlated with peer rejection and teacher-child conflict and negatively associated with peer acceptance and teacher-child closeness.

2. Prevalence in Bully/Victim Subgroups

Based on previous research(Schwartz, 2000), a criterion of .5 SD above and below the mean was applied as the cut-off to identify the subgroups of victimization. The decision to use this criterion was based on the following considerations. Previous studies(Pellegrini et al., 1999; Perry et al., 1988; Schwartz et al., 2001) have used stringent criteria, ranging from +.5 SD to +1 SD to classify children with high scores on either aggression or victimization. These studies have also used more lenient criteria, ranging from the mean to +.8 SD to classify children as low on either aggression or victimization. Therefore, to provide a rigorous estimate of both high and low victim groups, criteria of .5 SD above and below mean was applied.

Children whose scores for victimization and aggression were more than .5 were classified in the

(Table 1) Correlation among all variables

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Victimization									
Social behavior									
2. Aggression	.586***								
3. withdrawal	.446***	.293***							
4. Prosocial behavior	-.405***	-.385***	-.350***						
ADHD	.321***	.305***	.074	-.200***					
Peer status									
6. Peer acceptance	-.208***	-.080	-.185***	-.160**	-.104				
7. Peer rejection	.477***	.350***	.033	-.270***	.406***	-.083			
Teacher-child relationship									
8. Teacher-child closeness	-.368***	-.346***	-.322***	.554***	-.083	.106	-.156**		
9. Teacher-child conflict	.640***	.615***	.388***	-.473***	.251***	-.093	.340***	-.550***	
10. Language ability	-.205***	-.106	-.159**	.076	-.038	-.017	-.188***	.012	-.112
11. Self-concept	-.045	.094	.056	.015	.020	.105	.005	.016	.006

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$

〈Table 2〉 Prevalence in bully/victim subgroups

Subgroups	Boys		Girls		Total	
	f	%	f	%	f	%
Aggressive victim	30	18.07	22	16.79	52	18.12
Passive victim	7	4.22	11	8.40	18	6.28
Bully	28	16.87	27	20.61	55	19.17
Non-involved	101	60.84	71	54.20	172	59.93
Total	166	100	131	100	287	100

$\chi^2(3) = 3.292, ns.$

aggressive victim group; children whose victimization scores were more than .5 but whose aggression scores were less than zero were classified in the passive victim group; children whose aggression scores were more than .5 but whose victimization scores were less than zero were classified in the bully group; and the children whose victimization and aggression scores were less than zero were classified in the non-involved group.

Table 2 shows analysis of the prevalence of the four bully/victim subgroups by gender which were as follows; 52 aggressive victims(30 boys, 22 girls; 17.5% of the sample), 18 passive victims(7 boys, 11 girls; 6.1% of the sample), 55 bullies(28 boys, 27 girls; 18.5% of the sample), 172 non-involved children(101 boys, 71 girls; 57.9% of the sample).

Aggressive victims and non-involved children were more likely to be boys, and passive victims are more

likely to be girls. However, there were no significant gender differences in prevalence rates for the subgroups, $\chi^2(3) = 3.292, ns.$

3. Differences in Social Behaviors, Psychosocial Adjustments, and Language Ability by Bully/Victim Subgroups

Differences in psychosocial characteristics and language ability by bully/victim subgroups were investigated using a MANOVA with follow-up ANOVAs and post-hoc tests. There was a multivariate main effect of the subgroup for psychosocial variables, Wilks' Lamda = .952, $F(3, 293) = 2.424, p < .05.$ A series of post-hoc univariate ANOVAs was then conducted to investigate subgroup differences in psychosocial variables. As shown Table 3, a series univariate ANOVA indicated significant subgroup differences in several variables but not self-concept.

Aggressive victims have higher scores for aggression than passive victims and non-involved children. They also exhibited higher scores for withdrawal than bullies and non-involved children. Aggressive victims were rated as lowest for prosocial behavior. Compared with non-involved children, aggressive victims had higher levels of ADHD and lower levels of language ability. They received higher scores for peer rejection and

〈Table 3〉 Univariate analyses of bully/victim subgroup differences in social behaviors, psychosocial adjustments, and language ability

Variables	Main effect of subgroup	Aggressive victim (n = 52)		Passive victim (n = 18)		Bully (n = 55)		Non-involved (n = 127)	
	F level	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Social behaviors									
Aggression	44.892***	2.173 ^a	.247	1.541 ^b	.199	2.127 ^a	.203	1.326 ^c	.265
Withdrawal	31.440***	1.923 ^a	.372	1.994 ^a	.455	1.487 ^b	.380	1.408 ^c	.393
Prosocial behavior	16.401***	2.719 ^a	.304	3.138 ^{bc}	.428	3.009 ^b	.306	3.140 ^c	.414
ADHD	37.328***	1.134 ^a	1.917	.527 ^{ab}	1.344	.927 ^a	1.435	.287 ^b	.866
Peer status									
Peer acceptance	9.020*	-.327 ^a	.808	-.271 ^{ab}	.733	.072 ^b	.803	.103 ^b	.866
Peer rejection	44.106***	.662 ^a	1.438	.230 ^b	1.458	.265 ^b	.909	-.309 ^c	.623
Teacher-child relationships									
Teacher-child closeness	10.318***	3.000 ^a	.355	3.143 ^{abc}	.458	3.165 ^b	.413	3.335 ^c	.409
Teacher-child conflict	66.126***	2.046 ^a	.330	1.620 ^b	.370	1.678 ^b	.387	1.335 ^c	.306
Language ability	4.671**	45.49 ^a	7.478	46.38 ^{ab}	8.065	48.33 ^b	6.922	48.37 ^b	6.259
Self-concept	.929	3.414	.355	3.435	.450	3.353	.413	3.33	.409

Note. Means with different subscripts significantly differ according to post hoc tests.

* $p < .05.$ ** $p < .01.$ *** $p < .001$

conflicted relationships with teachers than any of the other groups.

Passive victims exhibited greater withdrawal than bullies or non-involved children, but not aggressive victims. They evidenced more prosocial behavior than aggressive victims. Moreover, passive victims had lower scores for peer rejection and teacher-child conflict than aggressive victims. Passive victims did not differ with non-involved children on peer acceptance and teacher-child closeness.

Bullies had higher scores for aggression than passive victims and non-involved children, and they were more hyperactive than non-involved children. In addition, compared with aggressive victims, they had higher language skills. Bullies did not differ with non-involved children on peer acceptance.

IV. Discussion

The present research was conducted to extend the previous literature by investigating bully/victim subgroups in preschool children. One objective was to investigate the prevalence and gender distribution across subgroups. The bully/victim prevalence rates were as follows: aggressive victim, 17.5%; passive victim, 6.1%; and bullies, 18.5%. These rates are higher than those in a Switzerland sample of a similar age reported by Perren and Alsaker(2005). However, the rates found in the current study cannot be directly compared with those found in previous studies because of differences in procedures, methods, and informants. The relatively higher rates of the subgroups in the current study could be partly explained by the lenient criteria used to allocate children to the subgroups by dividing aggression and victimization scores at .5 SD above the mean.

The present study found that aggressive victims were more prevalent than passive victims. This finding could be partly explained by developmental variations in the relationship between victimization and social behaviors. Externalizing characteristics like aggression may be strongly correlated with victimization in younger children, whereas internalizing characteristics like withdrawal are more strongly correlated with

victimization in older children (Hanish & Guerra, 2000).

There were no gender differences in the bully/victim subgroups. Approximately equal number of boys and girls were identified in the bully/victim subgroups, which indicates that girls are as much at risk for peer harassment as boys. This could be because relational as well as overt form of aggression was assessed. Crick, Casas, and Mosher(1997) suggested that measuring relational aggression identified more female aggressors.

Another objective of the present study was to investigate differences in psychosocial adjustments and language ability among the bully/victim subgroups. Children identified as aggressive victims differed significantly from those who were bullies only or were victimized only. They presented as a high risk group characterized by higher levels of aggression as well as withdrawal. They displayed prosocial behavior less frequently than any of the subgroups, and this appears to have reduced their ability to form and maintain positive relationships with their peers.

Moreover, aggressive victims scored higher than non-involved children on the ADHD checklist. This is consistent with the evidence of other research which shows that a high proportion of aggressive victims display symptoms of ADHD(Schwartz, 2000). The previous literature in ADHD suggested that some children displayed both attention-deficit/hyperactivity and conduct disorder. The behavioral characteristics of aggressive victims in the current study tend to be similar to these children. Children with ADHD exhibit several patterns of behaviors that peers find annoying, such as not waiting their turn in line, intrusively butting into a conversation, and displaying limited insight about the impact of their behaviors on others(Hinshaw & Melnick, 1995). These disruptive behaviors may create difficulties with peers.

In line with previous findings(Schwartz, 2000; Yiyuan et al., 2003), aggressive victims received the highest level of peer rejection. Perry et al.(1988) found that victimization and aggression appeared to make independent contributions to social rejection. Children who scored highly on both victimization and aggression experienced more peer rejection than those who scored highly on only one of these two dimensions(Perry et al., 1988).

The present study also showed that the aggressive

victims were highly rated as having conflicted relationships with teachers. Previous research suggested that levels of children's problem behavior tended to be the strongest predictor of teacher-child conflict(Murray & Murray, 2004). Externalizing problems including aggression, hyperactivity, and oppositionality are strongly associated with poor quality teacher-child relationships(Murray & Murray, 2004). Children who often manifest oppositional or disruptive behaviors are likely to break rules, upset classroom order and provoke confrontations with teachers (Safran & Safran, 1985).

Additionally, young children's language delay would distinguish aggressive victims from non-involved children, indicating aggressive victims possess limited language skills which are needed to develop positive peer relationships. Without adequate language skills, children may become frustrated and either aggress against or withdraw from others(Guralnick, Connor, Hammond, Gottman, & Kinnish, 1996), which may contribute to aggressive victim status.

Withdrawal was the risk factor differentiating passive victims from bullies and non-involved children. Previous literature has suggested an association between withdrawal and the emergence of chronic victimization by peers(Perry et al., 1988). Passive victims may be afraid to confront bullies and may have trouble defending themselves against harassment, thereby signaling their vulnerability to bullies(Crick et al., 1999).

Overall, compared with aggressive victims, passive victims appeared to be better adjusted. Passive victims were more accepted than aggressive victims, and peer acceptance of passive victims was not significantly different from that of the non-involved children. These results are consistent with those of Boulton and Smith (1994), who found that passive victims were not socially rejected by their classmates in contrast to what has been regularly found to be the case in older victims. This may reflect developmental changes in the relationship between withdrawal and social rejection. Previous research has suggested that the association between withdrawal behavior and peer group rejection does not emerge until middle childhood(Rubin, 1993). Young children are more attuned to peers' aggressive behaviors than their withdrawn behaviors because such behaviors

do not harm peers or disrupt their activities(Ladd & Mars, 1986). However, as their cognitive skills develop, older children begin to acquire a better understanding of behavioral norms and recognize that persons who show withdrawal characteristics in classroom are atypical(Younger, Gentile, & Burgess, 1993).

Furthermore, compared with aggressive victims, passive victims like non-involved children establish intimate relationships with their teachers and are unlikely to develop conflicted relationships. Similarly, Birch and Ladd(1998) found that teachers perceived withdrawn children as more dependent on them than other children and tended to spend much more time with them. Passive victims may also be wary of certain aspects of the classroom social milieu, and compensate for such feelings by seeking intimate relationships with teachers (Birch & Ladd, 1998).

With respect to the behavioral characteristics, bullies may already differ in early childhood from the other subgroups. The results of this study indicated that compared with non-involved children, bullies were more aggressive and hyperactive. Bullies differed from aggressive victims in several aspects: they received lower social withdrawal ratings and higher prosocial behavior ratings. They were more accepted, less rejected by peers and did not even differ from non-involved children on peer rejection. These findings support the assumption that being liked and being disliked is a two-dimensional construct(Coie, Dodge, & Coppotelli, 1982). Even though bullies have negative status within their peer group, they may have friends who support them. Perren and Alsaker(2005) found that bullies were well embedded in their kindergarten group and were members of larger social clusters.

Interestingly, the present study did not find any significant differences between the bully/victim subgroups in terms of self-concept. This is inconsistent with previous research findings for middle childhood and beyond (e.g., Boivin & Hymel, 1997; Egan & Perry, 1997). Although aggressive victims appear to have multiple psychosocial adjustment problems, their self-concepts were just as positive as those of socially adjusted children. Previous work has suggested that aggressive children have a tendency to overestimate and

misinterpret their own competencies in terms of peer evaluation(Hymel, Bower, & Woody, 1993). Because bullies and aggressive victims were found to be aggressive in the present study, they may have held inflated perceptions of themselves.

The developmental literature indicates that young children tend to be inaccurate judges of their own abilities, but accuracy does increase with age (Harter, 1998). Because young children have difficulty distinguishing between their desired and their actual competence, their self-concept during early childhood is likely to be unrealistically positive(Harter, 1998). Indeed, the mean scores on this measure were from 3.33 to 3.43 out of a possible 4.0, indicating that the ratings were skewed in the direction of positive concept.

Another explanation is possible in terms of the stability of victim status. Victims in early childhood differ from those identified in middle childhood and adolescence. During early childhood, most victims are not repeatedly victimized over long periods of time and may experience victimization for only brief periods of time(Monks et al., 2002). Kochenderfer and Ladd(1996) reported that as few as 8% of kindergarten children who were initially identified as victims continued to be victims 6 months later and that almost twice as many initial victims no longer met the criterion of repeatedly victimized. As a result, peer harassment may not damage their self-perceptions.

The present study has a number of limitations. Firstly, the present study included a relatively small sample of children, and replication is required with more representative samples for generalization of the results. Secondly, because the study used a cross-sectional design, there is a need for further research using longitudinal designs. Finally, the present research relied on teacher reports, which may result on confounding of shared-method variance. Future research should use objective, independent observers.

In conclusion, prevalence rates of the bully/victim subgroups in this sample were inconsistent with the previous literature owing to different methodologies. Aggressive victims, passive victims, and bullies manifest different social behaviors which could be risk factors for peer aggression or victimization. Moreover, aggressive

victims are also at the highest risk for psychosocial adjustment problems and language abilities. These findings were generally similar to those found in previous research in Western settings. Given that peer victimization was found to associate with several psychosocial maladjustments in the current study, preventive intervention against bullying needs to begin in preschools. Preschool age may be a particularly appropriate period to implement intervention considering the relatively high teacher-child ratio and flexible daily schedule of the preschool environment.

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